

**HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

**CABINET  
MONDAY 15 OCTOBER 2001 AT 10.00 AM**

**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE  
MONDAY 15 OCTOBER 2001 AT 2.15 PM**

Agenda Item No.

**4**

**FIRST PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON THE ROLL FORWARD OF THE  
COUNTY STRUCTURE PLAN**

Report of the Director of Environment

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**1. Purpose of report**

- 1.1 To inform the Cabinet and Executive Committee of the preliminary results of the county wide housing capacity study and to advise Cabinet and Executive of the Structure Plan Panel's recommendation that initial discussion takes place with District Councils prior to any form of public consultation.

**2. Summary**

- 2.1 In October 1999, the former Environment Committee resolved to commence the Roll Forward of the County Structure Plan to 2016. In carrying out the Roll Forward, the Committee agreed a series of resolutions which aimed to ensure a thorough assessment of housing capacity leading to a sequential approach to housing provision.
- 2.2 The preliminary results of the Housing Capacity Study are now available and have been reported to the Structure Plan Panel. The Study examined a number of land use strands, and confirmed the capacity of currently identified sites, the potential to increase capacity on those sites, and attempted to identify future potential for housing. The study has been informed by the work of consultants, who have surveyed the most accessible areas of the main settlements in the County and who have identified a number of propositions, which demonstrate the type of housing sites which may come forward.
- 2.3 The preliminary results show that the total potential housing capacity identified for the period 2001 to 2016 is approximately 62,000 dwellings. This total capacity figure comprises some 30,000 dwellings on identified sites. However, the identified sites include the strategic Greenfield allocation of West of Stevenage, and the Greenfield sites reserved for future development needs at Bishops Stortford and Panshanger. Total additional capacity identified through the Housing Capacity Study is some 32,000 dwellings. The

housing allocation for the County contained in Regional Planning Guidance Note 9 for the period 2001 to 2016 is some 49,200 dwellings.

### **3. Conclusion**

- 3.1 Having completed the first stage of the capacity study and having calculated the preliminary results, it was originally intended that public consultation should take place, to ensure a full understanding of the issues in relation to this work, before any decision is taken.
- 3.2 However, at a Joint member meeting which took place on 4 October, the District Councils formally requested that public consultation be deferred, to allow the Districts more time to consider the technical background papers, and to give an opportunity to try and achieve a consensus on the proposals, before they were subject to full public consultation.
- 3.3 The Structure Plan Panel very carefully considered this formal request at its meeting on 5 October. The Panel agreed to recommend to Cabinet and Executive Committee that the public consultation be deferred, to allow officer and member level meetings with Districts to take place. It was further recommended that this process should take place over a six week period up to the end of November. Following this six week period, a further Joint Member Meeting be arranged, to confirm the views of the Districts. The Structure Plan Panel propose then to meet to take stock of the next steps which need to be taken, with a view to making a further recommendation to Cabinet.

# 1. Background

## Introduction

- 1.1 In October 1999 the former Environment Committee considered a report on The Structure Plan and Greenfield Development. The Committee agreed that in order to examine how best to reduce the amount of greenfield development in the County, a review of the adopted plan should be commenced. At the heart of the technical work underpinning the Review was to be a thorough investigation of the capacity of settlements in the County to accommodate the housing figures of the emerging regional planning guidance. It was also agreed that whilst work on the physical capacity should be commenced, an initiative examining the qualitative aspects of development in towns should be launched, with a particular focus on how to achieve an urban renaissance in a Hertfordshire context.
- 1.2 Technical work on the housing capacity study commenced in early 2000, with the development of a methodology, in consultation with officers from the Districts, as resolved by the Environment Committee. The Study utilised a range of techniques for each strand. A key element of the study was a survey of the most accessible areas of the main settlements in the County by consultants. The methodology for this aspect of the Study was refined after a pilot exercise based on Hertford. Consultants were then employed to carry out survey work throughout the County.
- 1.3 In parallel, the Hertfordshire Town Renaissance campaign was launched in early 2000, with a conference which attracted interest from a wide variety of groups. The Campaign has gone on to hold a variety of technical seminars and events during the last 18 months. In addition, in order to engage a wider audience in the debate about quality development and the use of previously developed land, a Roadshow toured the County. The issues raised through the Campaign were documented and then taken into account as the Capacity Study progressed.
- 1.4 Whilst these major pieces of work were being undertaken, the debate about the housing figure for the County to be contained in Regional Planning Guidance Note 9 (RPG 9) continued. Eventually in March 2001, Central Government published the final version of the RPG. This set the annual rate for housing completions in the County at 3280 dwellings. Whilst the RPG set out that these rates should apply to the period up to 2006, it was also stated that this rate should be applied for plans covering a longer period, until a review of regional guidance advised otherwise. In the context of the Structure Plan Roll Forward plan period, this produced a total housing figure for 2001 to 2016 of 49,200 dwellings.
- 1.5 With a clear target set out in RPG 9, the Housing Capacity Study has now been progressed to a stage where the first preliminary results are in a form which can be shared and made available for comment. Section 2 of this report, together with the accompanying appendix, set out those results. In addition, in

parallel to the work undertaken on the Capacity Study, a great deal of technical work has taken place to appraise the rest of the policies of the Structure Plan and identify areas which should be reviewed or updated.

- 1.6 At its meeting on 5 October the Structure Plan Panel considered the preliminary results of the Housing Capacity Study and the suggested amendments to the Structure Plan policies.

## **2. Results of Housing Capacity Study**

- 2.1 Sufficient technical work has now been completed to make a **provisional** assessment of housing capacity in each Hertfordshire district during the 15 year period 2001 to 2016..

- 2.2 The study has sought to consider all sources of housing capacity, apart from allocating more green fields for development. Each source has been assessed separately, using methods that take full account of:

- Insights from earlier capacity work in Hertfordshire to inform preparation of the current Structure Plan
- Good practice guidance published by the Government on undertaking housing capacity studies
- feedback from the first phase of the Hertfordshire Town Renaissance Campaign.

- 2.3 The methodology has involved:

- Looking at the potential to provide more homes on sites already identified for housing;
- Analysis of recent trends in different types of development, and the factors which are likely to influence how these trends may change in the future;
- Surveys, including a survey by consultants to identify many more sites that might be suitable for housing, and difficult judgements on what proportion of these, realistically and sensibly, could be expected to be developed between now and 2016.

- 2.4 Appendix 1 to this paper summarises the methodology, key assumptions and policy judgements involved in the provisional assessments of potential form each source of capacity.

- 2.5 Adding together the provisional assessments of each source of capacity indicates an overall potential to provide up to about **62,000** more homes in Hertfordshire during the period 2001 to 2016. This is split into separate assessments for each source of capacity in each of the ten districts. The total includes at least 26,000<sup>1</sup> on sites that district councils have already identified in their reviews of local plans to meet needs in the period to 2011.

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<sup>1</sup> This includes 3,600 West of Stevenage in the period to 2011, as set out in the existing Structure Plan, but not land at Welwyn Garden City and Bishop Stortford which are now identified in local plan reviews to meet possible needs after 2011. Nor does it include a proposed Green Belt release in Broxbourne to which the County Council and Government Office have objected at this stage.

- 2.6 Having reached a provisional quantitative assessment, it will be necessary to undertake further work to consider more fully the ‘cumulative’ environmental and other impacts resulting from the sum of individual developments in each town.
- 2.7 The provisional 62,000 estimate of overall housing potential, based on work carried out so far, is approximately 12,800 more than the 49,200 figure for this period indicated by the current Regional Planning Guidance.

### **3. Policies on subjects other than housing and directly related issues**

- 3.1 Many of the policies in the current Structure Plan on matters other than housing and related development strategy issues are still up to date and either do not need to be changed yet or may require generally small changes.
- 3.2 The Panel had already given some consideration to the broad thrust of alterations that may be needed to policies in the Structure Plan other than those dealing with housing and directly related issues. Officers have now completed a ‘scoping’ exercise to try to identify systematically the full range of policy alterations that may be needed, including possibly some new policies.
- 3.4 Appendix 2 sets out possible alterations and draft new policies on which the Panel considers consultation at this stage would be helpful. Whilst the existing text of policies on housing and related development strategy issues is included for information and completeness, the document makes clear that alterations to those policies will not be considered until after the County Council has completed the Capacity Study.

### **4. District Liaison**

- 4.1 The progression of the technical work on the Housing Capacity Study has been underpinned by the joint Protocol that was agreed at the start of the exercise. One of the main purposes of the protocol was to ensure that the release of any material from the Capacity Study, which could be considered as sensitive, be delayed until results were available for the whole exercise, and that the information’s release was necessary to progress the Structure Plan.
- 4.2 It should be stressed that the technical work on both employment and housing matters has been progressed in close co-operation with the Districts, both through a special capacity study reference group and via HTCOA Development Plans Sub Committee. This close working relationship at officer level has been extremely beneficial to the technical work.
- 4.3 The first opportunity for the Districts to feed back their views on the Capacity Study, the protocol, and the review of the Structure Plan in general, was the Joint Member Meeting which took place on 4 October.

4.4 At the meeting, the District Councils expressed considerable concerns at the suggestion of an early round of public consultation. The Districts considered that they had not had sufficient time or detailed information on the Capacity Study as a whole, for them to give a formal view at this stage.

4.5 In response to this the Districts asked that the Structure Plan Panel consider the following resolution :-

“The District Councils strongly urge the County Council to defer any public consultation on the Structure Plan until after Districts have had time to consider the technical background papers and an opportunity to meet to try to achieve a consensus view on the proposals put before the public in accordance with the agreed joint protocol.”

4.6 Many Districts raised the question of whether site identification was to be part of the Structure Plan process.

4.7 In addition to the above concerns on process, several technical aspects were raised as follows:-

- The impact of using surplus employment land for housing and the basis for determining that surplus, both in qualitative and quantitative terms
- The impact of utilising small pockets of previously developed land on the deliverability of affordable housing
- The potential loss of facilities and the impact on existing infrastructure and services.

## **5 Response of the Structure Plan Panel.**

5.1. Whilst the Panel is content that the basis of the preliminary results of the Housing Capacity Study so far is sound, the genuine concerns of the Districts must be acknowledged. The Panel is anxious not to unnecessarily delay the progression of the Structure Plan. However, it considers that in the interests of seeking consensus on the housing figures, we should concentrate time and effort in briefing and discussing the Capacity Study with the Districts. The Panel considers that the opportunity should be given to Districts for Member and officer level meetings to take place, before any full round of public consultation based on the results of the Housing Capacity Study takes place.

5.2 It is proposed that the six week period to the end of November be used to complete the proposed series of officer and Member meetings. A further Joint Member Meeting should then be called for early December, to allow all Districts to confirm their views, each having had the opportunity for dialogue with the County Council. The member level dialogue should be conducted as far as is practical, on a cross party basis. It is also proposed that these meetings should take the opportunity to examine the proposed changes in the wording of Structure Plan policies.

- 5.3 The Structure Plan Panel would then meet following that Joint Member meeting, to take stock of the situation, consider how the Structure Plan Roll forward should be progressed, and subsequent public consultation carried out.
- 5.4 In the meantime, any proposals for general public consultation be deferred. In particular, in response to the request of the Districts, the Consultant's propositions be maintained as material confidential to the County Council and District Councils. However, the technical background papers would be completed and made available to the Districts. In addition, should any statutory or other significant consultee approach the County Council for clarification of the technical work underpinning the Housing Capacity Study, that officers be authorised to clarify material which is now in the public realm.

## **6. Conclusions**

- 6.1 With the preliminary results of the Housing Capacity Study now being available, it was intended that a full and wide ranging programme of public consultation should be commenced, to test these figures and their underlying assumptions. However, it is clear that many of the Districts are extremely concerned about the Capacity Study results being subject to consultation in advance of them gaining a full understanding of the technical background to the figures. There are also concerns about the potential scale of housing capacity identified and the impacts on affordable housing and many Districts are also concerned to try and reach a consensus on the figures before they are more widely discussed.
- 6.2 The Structure Plan Panel has considered the merits of the points raised by the Districts, and have concluded that to give the Districts a further opportunity to comment on the emerging study would be appropriate. It is recommended therefore that full public consultation on the Study be deferred, to allow meetings with Districts to take place at officer and Member level. These meetings should focus on both the Housing Capacity Study and the proposed changes to the Policies of the Structure Plan, as set out in the draft public consultation document.
- 6.3 These meetings are proposed to take place over the next 6 weeks, with a view to being concluded by the end of November. Following this, a further Joint Member Level Meeting will be convened to allow each District the opportunity to restate their views. The Structure Plan Panel will then meet to take stock of the situation and map out the next steps in the process.
- 6.4 To support this programme of meetings and briefings, officers will prepare draft technical papers, which will be supplied to Districts. These papers will contain the justification for the employment land proposals, together with a more detailed explanation of the methodology and assumptions which underpin the housing capacity study.

- 6.5 Turning to the consultants work on propositions, it is proposed that in line with the request by Districts these be kept as confidential material, available only to District and County officers and Members at this stage.
- 6.6 It is also recommended that should officers be approached by statutory or other major consultees, with regard to information which is in the public realm, that officers be permitted to clarify material relating to the Housing Capacity Study.

## **7. Financial Implications**

- 7.1 The consultation exercise will be carried out within existing budget provision for the preparation of the Structure Plan.